



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Enfield Council  
Sent via email to: [libraries.engagement@enfield.gov.uk](mailto:libraries.engagement@enfield.gov.uk)

Our Ref: BC47091

3 October 2024

Dear Enfield Council Officers

**Re: Developing a new library strategy for Enfield**

I am writing in relation to Enfield Council's First stage consultation, Developing a new library strategy for Enfield. I wish to put forward the following concerns on behalf of constituents of Southgate and Wood Green. I will also reiterate concerns raised in my response to Enfield Council's first stage library consultation in January 2024.

I do not seek to underestimate the dire need for Enfield Council to long term plan against funding pressures. It is reassuring that Enfield Council is working diligently to fulfil their duty to set a balanced budget following a 42% reduction in overall funding since 2010. It is noted the Council continues to see a rise in costs for temporary accommodation and social care stretching an already fragile budget.

In brief, the proposal seeks residents' permission to improve and enhance the library service in hubs in areas of high need in the east of the borough and maintain hubs only in the west of the borough where services are in less demand.

The constituency of Southgate and Wood Green enjoys Bowes Road, Palmers Green, Oakwood and Southgate libraries. Winchmore Hill library is now just outside the constituency boundary. Collectively this offers 215.5 hours of library services, however proposals see a loss of 156.5 hours leaving the area with 60 hours of services each week.

Access to a library close to your address is vital to many of our most vulnerable residents who rely on the libraries for social contact, a place of warmth and links to services such as Enfield Connections and Age UK activities. The wellbeing and achievements of our community must be safeguarded against cuts that cannot be reversed.

With population increases, libraries maintain a place of quiet study as we continue to see a rise in overcrowding in homes and families living in temporary accommodation across the borough. Many of our young people who will be accessing the libraries are seeking a place of quiet study. Palmers Green ward alone has seen a population increase by 8.4% since 2011. Children of families struggling with this cost-of-living and housing crisis must not be further isolated.

Bowes Road Library has a high level of library usage among 0-9 and 10-19-year-olds (18% and 14% respectively), which suggests that the library is essential for young residents early years development.

According to the Local Government Association report 'How council library services can support children and families in the earliest years' (2022) found that libraries are key in getting children ready for formal education, as they provide suitable reading age material, and incentivise children to read through initiatives, such as the Summer Reading Challenge. A child taken to the library monthly from three to five years old is



2.5 months ahead of an equivalent child who did not frequently go to a library.

The proposal has caused concerns across the constituency with residents sharing their personal experience. One resident has allowed me to share their experience of how vital a local community library branch is:

*"I am an OAP and not able to get about easily. Luckily, I can still walk up the road to Southgate Library and enjoy the many cultural amenities it provides. Such as an excellent art class. This is what I do not want to lose!"*

Statistics from Age UK suggests 1.9 million older people often feel ignored or invisible. Oakwood Library serves the Oakwood and Cockfosters area, according to Enfield Council data has significantly more residents aged 65+ (18%) when compared to the borough population (14%). Age UK research confirms a range of factors cause loneliness including lack of community venues and activities within their ward area.

Closure of libraries will also exacerbate the boroughs loss of community venues. I often receive enquiries through my work from community groups looking for community venues for hire which are lacking in the borough. Community groups could offer long-term bookings for rooms in larger libraries, or use of smaller libraries out of hours.

In addition to loss of library service hours, residents will lose events and clubs, community groups they enjoy and rely on. It is concerning that young people will lose a place of study, older people will lose a place of community and conversation, and benefit claimants will lose. Whilst Palmers Green library will remain open under proposals, the use of desk space, computers and rooms for hire will become more competitive.

Whilst outside the constituency, the closure of John Jackson Library has caused concerns as it a current Age UK hub and home to much needed Men Shed's project that offers a place for men to build skills and friendships.

Yours sincerely

*Bambos Charalambous*

Bambos Charalambous MP